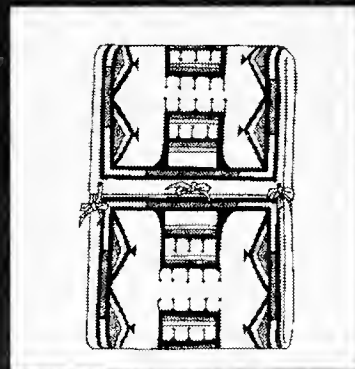
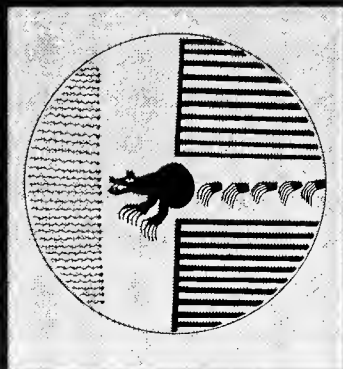
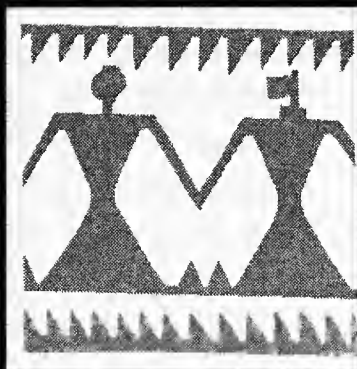
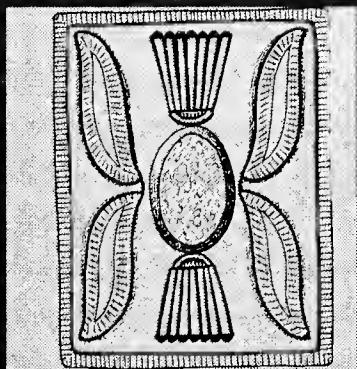


The Intimate Side of Diabetes



Indian Health Service National Diabetes Program

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A natural part of life

Sexuality and having children are a natural and special part of life.

Have you every wondered if diabetes affects these areas? Perhaps you've had questions, but felt uncomfortable asking them.

This booklet will help! Common questions and answers about sexuality and pregnancy are provided. Some of the terms used are listed on page 15.

Share this booklet with your partner. If you need more information, or have questions, ask your health care provider.

People may have questions about diabetes and sexuality.

**Controlling your
diabetes may help
your love-life!**

General questions about diabetes and sex

■ Will diabetes affect your desire for sex?

Not directly. Diabetes does not affect sexual desire in men or women. However, diabetes brings many changes into your life. These changes may, at times, make you feel angry, scared or depressed. These feelings may affect how you respond to your partner.

If your diabetes is out of control, you may also be too tired for an active sex life. **The key is to control your blood sugar.** Controlling your blood sugar may improve your love-life!

■ Does your sugar level affect your sexual enjoyment?

It may. Low blood sugar in both men and women may affect sexual enjoyment. Some women may not reach orgasm. Some men may have problems with erections.

Also, for some people, sexual intercourse may cause low blood sugar. Keep some fast-acting sugar nearby to use if needed. Be prepared.

Men's questions and answers

Diabetes may or may not cause sexual problems.

■ As a man, will diabetes cause any sexual problems?

In most cases, diabetes **does not** affect your:

- sex drive
- ability to father children
- ability to ejaculate
- capacity to experience an orgasm

■ Does diabetes cause trouble with an erection?

Sometimes. Trouble getting or keeping an erection may or may not be caused by diabetes.

Trouble with an erection may be temporary.

It may be caused by:

- Anxiety. A person may feel anxious when first told that he has diabetes.
- High blood sugar. Trouble with an erection may occur when diabetes is out of control.
- Nerve and blood vessel damage.

Stress and anxiety can cause trouble with an erection.

■ Can other things cause trouble with an erection?

Yes. Trouble with an erection can be caused by:

- Stress. When under stress, men (those who have diabetes and those who do not) may have trouble having an erection.
- Drugs and alcohol. Trouble with an erection may be a side-effect of drugs or alcohol. This can include tranquilizers, hormones, blood pressure pills, marijuana and alcohol.

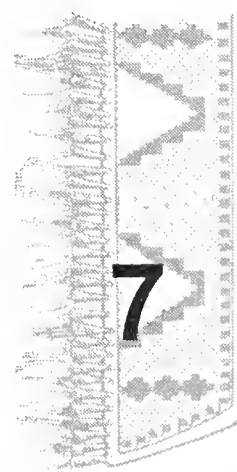
■ Will controlling blood sugar help problems with an erection?

Yes! Controlling your blood sugar can decrease (or slow down) your chances of having problems with an erection.

■ If diabetes is the cause, what can help?

- Improved control. Better control of diabetes often results in improved sexual performance. Your health care provider, diabetes educator and nutritionist can help you get better control of diabetes.
- Penile implants. Implants are sometimes used when men have problems with erections. For more information, talk to your health care provider.
- Counseling. Counseling may be your choice of treatment when nerve and blood vessel damage are present. Sexual gratification can occur in ways other than sexual intercourse. Counseling will help you and your partner become aware of alternatives.

Trouble with an erection is not always caused by diabetes.



**There are ways
to help.**

■ **If there is another cause, what can help?**

- Counseling. If your problem is due to stress in your life, counseling may be an effective treatment.
- Medicine. If medicines are thought to be the cause, your health care provider may change your medicine. Never stop taking your medicine on your own.
- Hormone balance. Erection problems caused by hormone imbalance can be treated with medicine.

Women's questions and answers

■ As a woman, will diabetes cause any sexual problems?

In most cases, diabetes **does not** affect your:

- sex drive
- ability to experience an orgasm

Some women may experience pain during sex. It could be due to:

- Vaginal infection. Vaginal infections are more likely to occur if your diabetes is out of control. When you have an infection, you may have itching or burning. You may have swollen tissues in and around the vagina. Talk to your health care provider. They may prescribe some medicine for the infection.
- Neuropathy (disease of nerve fibers). Neuropathy may reduce the natural lubricating fluids released during intercourse. Your health care provider can suggest a lubricating jelly which will help.

For most women, diabetes will not affect your sex drive.

**Talk to your
health care
provider.
They can help
you learn more
about diabetes
and pregnancy.**

■ **Can your menstrual period affect your blood sugar?**

It may. Some women notice changes in their blood sugar. This may occur just before and during their period. You may need to test your blood sugar more often during your period. This will help you and your health care provider decide how to adjust your eating, physical activity and medicine.

■ **Will diabetes affect your chance of becoming pregnant?**

No. The chances of women who have diabetes becoming pregnant are the same as for those who do not have diabetes.

■ **How will you know if it is “safe” to get pregnant?**

Talk to a health care provider who knows about diabetes and pregnancy. They will tell you whether or not it is wise for you to become pregnant. They will consider:

- Your age and how long you've had diabetes.
- If you have had eye or kidney complications.

Even if you have complications, you may still be able to have a child.

■ What factors should you consider before you become pregnant?

Think carefully before you decide to become pregnant. It is very important that you think about these things:

- Use birth control until your blood sugars are in good control before you get pregnant.
- You will need to work to maintain good control of your diabetes during pregnancy.
- It's best to be at or close to your ideal body weight before you become pregnant.
- Both you and your partner should have a good understanding of how to manage diabetes.
- Keep in mind that pregnancy will require extra responsibilities:
 - checking your blood sugar
 - taking insulin or changing your insulin dose
 - seeing your health care provider more often

**Diabetes control
is the key to a
successful
pregnancy.**

**Choose a birth
control method
that is best
for you.**

■ **What method of birth control
would be best to use?**

It's hard to say what would be "best" for you. This is something you need to discuss with your partner and your health care provider. Here are some birth control choices:

- Birth control pills. The types of pills with the least risk to women with diabetes are the low-dose combined or progesterone-only pills.
- IUD (inter-uterine device). An IUD is almost as effective as the pill.
- Other methods -- the diaphragm, foam and condom. They may not be as effective as the pill or IUD.

■ What can you do to increase your chances of having a healthy baby?

You have a better chance of having a healthy baby if your blood sugar is in control.

Controlling your blood sugar throughout your pregnancy gives your baby the best chance for good health. Your chances are even better if you can maintain good control three months before getting pregnant.

■ Will your children develop diabetes?

Maybe. But you can help! You can lower the chances of your children developing diabetes by:

- keeping good control of your sugar during pregnancy
- breast-feeding your baby
- keeping your children active as they grow up

**Get control of
your blood sugar
before you decide
to get pregnant.**

**You can have a
healthy baby.**

**Ask your health
care provider
for help.**

■ **Who can you see to find out more
about having a healthy pregnancy?**

There are many health care providers who can help you:

- an obstetrician who knows about pregnancy and diabetes
- a pediatrician
- diabetes educators
- nutritionists

Definitions and Terms

anxiety: worry, fear

ejaculate: the sperm and secretions that are released from the penis during orgasm

erectile problems: being unable to keep an erection that will allow vaginal penetration

hypoglycemia: low blood sugar

neuropathy: disease of nerve fibers
(a complication of diabetes)

orgasm: intense, emotional and physical pleasure that occurs at the peak of sexual intercourse

penile implant: sometimes used when men have problems with erections

side-effect: an unwanted effect from a drug



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